



# LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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## **Tobacco-Free Centennial Park Will Be Breath of Fresh Air for All**

The Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department is proud to have supported the development of Centennial Park.

As advocates for public health, we applaud the new opportunities for physical activity that the park provides, including a fitness trail and soccer fields. We also applaud city officials for resolving to make this park tobacco-free. You will notice the friendly signs indicating that the park is tobacco free “for the health and enjoyment of all.”

Getting more physical activity and avoiding tobacco are two of the most effective steps people can take to prevent chronic diseases like cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

There is growing recognition that the built environment – the physical structures and infrastructure of a community – plays a significant role in shaping the health of residents.

According to the Prevention Institute, a national policy and research organization, “Decisions about land use, zoning, and community design have implications for neighborhood access to healthy foods and the level of safety and attractiveness of neighborhoods for activities such as walking and biking. The designated use, layout, and design of a community’s physical structures – including its housing, businesses, transportation systems, and recreational resources – affect patterns of living (behaviors) that, in turn, influence health.”

That’s why the department was grateful to have a seat at the table during phases of the park development. At such times, we had the opportunity to point out links between design and policy decisions and their impacts on public health.

Our physical environment can promote good health directly through access to clean air and water. It also can influence people’s behavior by encouraging healthy activities like walking, bicycling, and healthy eating. For example, if a neighborhood has no sidewalks or bicycle or walking paths, residents may be more sedentary. Such a lifestyle is proven to lead to poor health outcomes like obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer.

Centennial Park is a wonderful example of various groups and individuals contributing to the health of our community through collaboration.

Additional examples of health department collaboration are the annual Commuter Challenge, the Walk and Bike to School Month, the Open Streets event, and “bike rodeos” in conjunction with some of the Lewis and Clark County library bookmobile stops. These rodeos are scheduled for late August and

early September. They'll provide an active and fun venue in which to educate youth about bicycle safety and encourage biking as a form of exercise.

As we work to promote and improve the health of county residents, we'll continue to work with our partners to increase opportunities for active living and greater well-being for people of all ages. It will take this kind of cooperation to make the healthy choice the easy choice in Helena.

If you would like more information about the built environment, physical activity and impacts on health, please contact the Chronic Disease Prevention Programs of the health department, 457-8960 or [healthinfo@lccountymt.gov](mailto:healthinfo@lccountymt.gov). If you want help quitting tobacco use, please call the Montana Tobacco Quitline, 1-800-QUIT-NOW.